



May 11, 2026 SEEK CT Legislative Update

The Connecticut Legislative session ended at midnight on May 6. It was not a very consequential session for special education, which was a relief after the far more damaging 2025 session. The SEEK Legislative Committee (Andy Feinstein, John Flanders, Naomi Nova and Stacey Tie) was actively involved, alongside our professional lobbyist Jay Aronson, throughout the session. We testified before five committees on more than a dozen bills. We met with legislators and other advocates. Here is the bottom line:

School Funding

As part of the budget agreement, an additional \$180 million is devoted to state support for local education. A few points: 1. Except for a \$30 million Special Education and Expansion Development (SEED) grant, Connecticut appropriates no money directly for special education. Rather, local districts use their combination of property tax revenues, state aid and federal aid to fund education, including special education. On average, special education accounts for 27% of local school budgets in the state. So, this additional money for education needs to be divided up by the local district. The budget did add \$3.3 million for special education initiatives. 2. A big debate occurred over whether this additional money would be a one-year shot in the arm or permanent. Instead of making permanent changes in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, the Legislature provided funding through a Supplemental grant that can be viewed as increasing the foundation amount to \$13,087. We will see next session whether this money will be continuing. A permanent increase in funding levels is far more likely to encourage districts to hire additional needed staff. 3. Districts must spend at least as much as they did for education during the prior school year, with certain exceptions, known as the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). Where the new money would take the district far above the MBR, the town has the ability to transfer the additional money to reduce property taxes. 4. Connecticut has a catastrophic insurance program whereby the state pays a portion of the Excess Cost of special education placements that cost more than 4.5 times the average per pupil cost of the district. Fully funding this program would cost over \$300 million. The budget keeps last years' level of \$221 million.

The bottom line is that special education should be better funded under the budget agreement. We expect the money to be directed, in the first instance, to filling the numerous vacant slots for special education teachers, related service providers and paraeducators.

Same Day Notification of Restraint and Seclusion

A requirement that parents be notified that their child was restrained or secluded on the same day as the restraint or seclusion took place was passed, at SEEK's urging, as part of the Emergency Certified Bill, enacted as Section 42 of Public Act 96-1.

Suspension, Expulsion

Public Act 96-1 also provided the out of school suspension is only warranted for serious physical harm, not just physical harm. Note that federal law requires the expulsion of students for weapons or drug possession in school. Further, the new law guarantees educational services for expelled students between 16 and 18 during the second time they are expelled. The requirement used to apply only to the first expulsion.

Trauma-Informed Crisis Response Drills

Public Act 96-1 codified language requiring that the needs of students with special needs be taken into account when designing protocols for crisis response drills.

Homeschooling

The Legislature passed H.B. 5468, a highly watered-down version of the original homeschool bill. SEEK raised numerous concerns about provisions of the original bill as they related to Child Find and unilateral parental placements. As enacted, the bill no longer poses many of those challenges. The bill requires parents to register their intent to provide parent-directed learning and requires districts to check whether parents are on a child abuse register. The bill no longer requires proof of educational progress.

Connecticut Replacement for OCR

Watching the Trump Administration hollow out the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the US Department of Education, SEEK set as its first priority the creation of a Connecticut unit to provide a no-cost mechanism for parents to vindicate the civil and constitutional rights of their children. We met with the top staff of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) and learned that the CHRO was willing and able to fill the role. Connecticut human rights law has broader coverage than federal ADA or 504 law but lacked the integration mandate of the federal law. So, SEEK worked with other advocates to pass S.B. 430 which adds the integration mandate to Connecticut law. In the future, we will work to set tighter timelines for CHRO adjudication of education cases and to increase funding if, as we expect, the number of complaints to CHRO increases.

Intellectual Disability

Currently Connecticut is one a handful of states that uses a rigid IQ score cut-off to determine eligibility for adult services for individuals with intellectual disabilities. After extensive negotiations, we arrived at a compromise with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) requiring DDS to “produce a plan with recommendations on developing a standard definition of intellectual disability that originates before an individual attains eighteen years of age and is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, including, but not limited to, conceptual, social and practical skills.” DDS needs to report on its progress by July 1, 2027. This is a small step in the right direction.

Literacy

S.B. 220, as amended, merely requires the State Department of Education to issue “guidance to local and regional boards of education regarding the implementation of multitiered systems of support or response to intervention frameworks for students who are identified as struggling in reading.” The more ambitious provisions in the bill reported out of the Education Committee were deleted.

Education Ombudsperson

The Office of the Education Ombudsperson, created in last year’s major special education legislation, was abolished.

Cell Phones in School

The bill (H.B. 5035) to create a statewide bell-to-bell ban on cell phones in school died at the end of the session when Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff decided that maintaining local control was more appropriate than a state-wide mandate.

Life-Threatening Restraints

Legislation (H.B. 5325) to ban the use of restraints “deemed life-threatening by such person's health care provider based on such person's existing medical conditions” died when the Senate would not agree to move such legislation.

Miscellaneous Changes

The Legislature passed H.B. 5323, which permitted schools to hire retired parole officers to provide armed security services but prohibited the hiring of police and parole officers who left employment during an investigation or after disciplinary action from providing armed security services in schools; created a therapeutic arts grant program; delayed the effective date of the repeal of various educator preparation regulations from July 1, 2026, to July 1, 2027; established an incentive program for school districts that limits broad assessments, integrates formative assessment tools, and increases teacher competency in the assessment process; allowed SDE to submit a request to the U.S. Department of Education to amend the state’s approved plan submitted pursuant to ESSA; required SDE to (1) redesign the state’s high school mathematics pathways, (2) develop a list of professional development providers for high quality mathematics instruction, (3) explore the feasibility of launching MathConn, and (4) develop mathematics specialist guidelines; and made various revisions to the laws on the disclosure of certain misconduct-related information during the hiring process of a prospective school employee.